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ABSTRACT

Social-distance attitudes of preservice teachers from middle and lower social classes toward minority and national groups are examined. Social distance, the aloofness and unapproachability of persons of different social strata, is both a symbol of class standing and a means of maintaining the existing distinctions in rank. The Bogardus Social Distance Scale was administered to 251 Mankato State preservice teachers who responded to the degree of intimacy they would allow to members of outgroups. Social-distance attitudes of preservice teachers from upper-middle and lower-middle, upper-middle and lower, and lower-middle and lower social classes were measured. The effect of educational home background (high-school diploma or partial college) on the difference in social distance attitudes was also considered. The results indicate that teachers from the upper-middle social class tend to have a significantly greater social distance attitude toward minority and national groups than teachers from either lower-middle or lower social classes. The social-distance attitudes of the preservice teachers toward minority groups appear to be related functionally to the social status positions of the teachers' families as defined by educational attainment. (Author/DE)

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DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL DISTANCE ATTITUDES BETWEEN GROUPS OF MIDDLE AND LOWER SOCIAL CLASS PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TOWARD MINORITY AND NATIONAL GROUPS

by

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SO 008 366

ABSTRACT

The goal of the present study was to determine if a statistically significant social distance attitude difference exists between groups of middle and lower social class pre-service teachers toward minority and national groups. In light of the purpose of this study, the following research questions were formulated to guide the research process: Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between (a) upper-middle and lower-middle social class (part-college home background) pre-service teachers? (b) upper-middle and lower-middle social class (high-school diploma home background) pre-service teachers? (c) upper-middle and lower social class pre-service teachers? (d) lower-middle (part-college home background) and lower-middle social class (high-school diploma home background) pre-service teachers? (e) lower-middle (part-college home background) and lower social class pre-service teachers? (f) lower-middle (high-school diploma home background) and lower social class pre-service teachers? The Bogardus Social Distance Scale was administered to 251 Mankato State University pre-service teachers. Critical ratio or t-test scores revealed significant differences for three of the six comparisons. On the basis of these findings, it was concluded that: Upper-middle social class pre-service teachers tend to have a significantly more favorable or positive social distance attitude toward minority and national groups than either lower-middle or lower social class pre-service teachers. The social distance attitudes of Mankato State University pre-service teachers toward minority and national groups appears to be related functionally to the social status positions of their families as defined by educational attainment.

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL DISTANCE ATTITUDES BETWEEN GROUPS OF MIDDLE AND LOWER SOCIAL CLASS PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TOWARD MINORITY AND NATIONAL GROUPS

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The earliest social distance attitude scale was developed by Bogardus in 1925. His intent was to develop an instrument to measure attitudes toward such secondary groups as races and nationalities. Interest in the measurement of attitudes toward such groups, especially toward minority groups continues today. The study of such attitudes is most relevant for the investigation of prejudice and intergroup relations and seems essential both to such theoretically important areas as understanding and peace at the international level. (1)

Although the Bogardus scales have been used chiefly for the study of ethnic and racial distance, a few studies have linked social class or social status with social distance. Hiller's definition of social class reads, "A social class is differentiated by relatively persistent dissimilarities in rank and separated from other strata by social distance." (2) He goes on to comment that "Social distance--the aloofness and unapproachability of persons, especially those of different social strata--is both a symbol of class standing and a means of maintaining the existing distinctions in rank." (3) Ellis made a study of social status and social distance in Jamaica, and concluded that "friendliness" with others tends to be associated with similarity of social status. (4)

Bogardus has commented that:

> Status is one of the most important components in all social distance situations. It is an everpresent, unseen, psychological element. . . .
>
> When a person's social status is attacked or lowered he begins to feel a sense of prejudice, and personal distances increase between himself and the one who has undermined his status. When a person's basic and powerful wish for recognition has been thwarted his personality has been challenged, and he plays a withdrawing role from the challenger. There appears to be a direct relation between the degree to which one's status is lowered and the extent to which he draws back and increases the personal distance between himself and the person who deliberately unwittingly has lowered his status, that is, increases the distance differential. (5)

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Research conducted by educational sociologists focusing on teacher attitudes toward minority and national groups is inconclusive. Little research relative to differences in social distance attitudes between

teachers has been conducted by sociologists during this decade. Consequently, to meet this insistent need, the goal of this study was to determine if significant social distance attitude differences exist between groups of middle and lower social class pre-service teachers toward minority and national groups.

In light of the purpose of this study, the following research questions were constructed to guide the research process: Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between upper-middle pre-service teachers and lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background)? Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between upper-middle class pre-service teachers and lower-middle class pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background)? Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between upper-middle class pre-service teachers and lower class pre-service teachers? Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) and lower-middle class pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background)? Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) and lower class pre-service teachers? Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between lower-middle class pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background) and lower class pre-service teachers?

The research on changing pre-service teacher attitudes in positive directions toward a wide range of minority and national groups is both sparse and inconclusive. This is unfortunate, because the teacher is the most important variable in the child's learning environment. Teacher attitudes and expectations have a profound impact on students' perceptions, academic behavior, self-concepts, and beliefs. To maximize the chances for successful attitude intervention programs at the pre-service level experiences must be designed specifically for that purpose. Those persons responsible for designing experiences to change pre-service teacher attitudes in positive directions must consider the pre-service teachers' social class background as a necessary variable in the total intervention process.

Perhaps those persons responsible for the recruitment and assignment of teachers in the field must also consider the teachers' social class background as a necessary variable in the all important task. The assignment of teachers, for example, with the most favorable and positive attitude toward minority groups to the ghetto, reservation, or barrio communities would seem to be the most propitious course of action for school personnel directors to follow.

METHOD

Subjects

The typical Mankato State University freshman in 1975 had an American College Testing (ACT) composite score of 20.6 and a High School Average (HSA) of 2.9. This is a little higher than national averages of 19.5 and 2.8 respectively on enrolled freshman norms. The student typically was in a college preparatory high school program. In economic background, the great majority of the freshmen come from families of less than $15,000 annual income, with the largest concentration in the $9,000 to $11,999 range. The

vast majority of the entering freshmen, 86 percent, are from Minnesota. Of the Minnesota students, 42 percent of that group are from the eight-county area around Mankato State University. (6) These data closely reflect the typical enrollee in the professional education sequence at Mankato State University School of Education.

This study involved 251 white pre-service education majors, 87 men and 164 women. Subjects were selected from the Introduction to Education course, during the academic school years 1973 to 1975. Although this course is listed as the initial requirement in the professional education sequence for sophomores, its actual composition was somewhat different: 9 freshmen (6 percent); 75 sophomores (49 percent); 49 juniors (32 percent); 19 seniors (13 percent). Table 1 shows the social class background composition of the subjects: 29 upper-middle class (12 percent); 77 lower-middle class (part-college home background) (31 percent); 81 lower-middle class (high-school diploma home background) (32 percent); and 64 lower class (25 percent). These data indicate that the typical education major at Mankato State University comes from a "common-man" home background. (7)

Procedure

The purpose of this study was to determine if significant social distance attitude differences exist between groups of middle and lower class pre-service teachers toward minority and national groups.

In light of the purpose of this study, the Bogardus Social Distance Scale was administered to the subjects by the investigator. This scale was originally developed by Bogardus in 1925 to measure social distance, or the degree of intimacy an individual would allow to members of outgroups. He saw social distance as scaled along a continuum from extreme nearness to extreme farness. By nearness, he referred to positive sentiments, such as warmth and identification. (8)

Study subjects were asked to respond to an equal-appearing interval scale consisting of four positive feelings or sentiments about other groups: (a) would marry into group; (b) would have as close friends; (c) would have as nextdoor neighbors; and (d) would work in the same office; in that order. Thus, willingness to marry indicates the highest degree of social nearness. As the equal appearing interval scale makes the transition from nearness to farness, the items that follow are: (e) would have as a speaking acquaintance only; (f) would have as visitors only to my nation; and (g) would debar from my nation. The wish that the people be barred from entry into this country thus represents the strongest possible negative sentiment on the scale. (9)

Subjects were directed to: (a) give their first feeling reactions for every group; (b) give feeling reactions to their chief picture of each group as a whole; (c) check as many of the seven columns (from nearness to farness) for each group as they can; and (d) work rapidly. The minority and national groups were:

1. Armenians
2. Americans (U.S. whites)
3. Canadians
4. Chinese
5. Czechs
6. English
7. Filipinos
8. Finns
9. French
10. Germans
11. Greeks
12. Hollanders
13. Indians (American)
14. Indians (of India)
15. Irish
16. Italians
17. Japanese
18. Japanese (American)
19. Jews
20. Koreans
21. Mexicans

TABLE 1

BOGARDUS SOCIAL SCALE
MEANS OF SOCIAL CLASS GROUPS

Social Class Group	Number of Cases	Social Distance Scale Mean
Upper-Middle	29	38.41
Lower-Middle*	77	45.25
Lower-Middle**	81	49.56
Lower	64	45.61

*Part-College Home Background
**High-School Home Background

22. Mexican (American)
23. Negroes
24. Norwegians
25. Poles
26. Russians
27. Scots
28. Spanish
29. Swedish
30. Turks (10)

Raw scores for each subject were computed. The lowest possible individual score was 30 indicating that the subject would marry into each of the 30 groups. Highest possible score was 210 indicating that the subject would debar all 30 groups from this country.

A single factor social class classification system, based upon the combined educational level of the parents of the subjects, was developed by the investigator from the work of Kahl. He suggests that each stratum attains a certain educational level relative to their style of life:

Upper Class: Ivy School Education
Upper-Middle Class: College Degree; Graduate School
Lower-Middle Class: Senior High School Diploma: Part-College
Upper-Lower Class: Jr. High School; Part-Senior High School
Lower-Lower Class: Elementary School; Part-Jr. High School (11).

Those subjects whose parents combined years of education totaled 32 or more were classified as upper-middle class. The lower-middle class was divided into two distinct parts: (a) those subjects whose parents combined years of education exceeded 24 years but did not equal 32 years; and (b) those subjects whose parents combined years of education equaled 24 years. The small number of lower-lower subjects suggested that the upper-lower and lower-lower classes be combined into a lower class grouping. Consequently, those subjects whose parents combined years of education totaled less than 24 years were classified as lower class. Data obtained from this technique appear in Table 1.

A set of research questions previously cited in the statement of the problem were formulated to guide the research process.

Data gathered pertinent to the research problems and questions of this study were tabulated on IBM cards and submitted to the Mankato State University Computer Center to determine the critical ratio or (t) scores and the level of significance (s).

Fisher's T-Test, based upon the standard error of the differences between means, was used to determine the significance of the differences between groups which were being compared. Means for groups being compared appear in Table 1.

The .05 level of significance was determined to be sufficiently exacting for this investigation.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine if significant social distance attitude differences exist between groups of middle and lower social class pre-service teachers toward minority and national groups.

Critical ratio or t scores and levels of significance between the means of groups compared are presented in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, significant differences were revealed for three of the six comparisons.

TABLE 2

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOCIAL CLASS GROUPS

Social Class Groups Compared	Difference Between Means	Critical Ratio (t)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Level of Significance (p)
A and B	- 6.83	-2.59	85	.01
A and C	-11.14	-3.25	108	.002
A and D	- 7.20	-2.41	89	.02
B and C	- 4.31	-1.24	137	.22
B and D	- .36	- .12	127	.91
C and D	3.95	1.06	142	.29

A Upper-Middle
B Lower-Middle (Part-College Home Background)
C Lower-Middle (High-School Diploma Home Background)
D Lower

DISCUSSION

Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between upper-middle class pre-service teachers and lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background)? As seen in Table 2, a mean difference of -6.83 favoring the upper-middle class pre-service teachers yielded a critical ratio or t of -2.59 at the .01 level of significance. This level of significance indicates a significant difference between groups for 85 degrees of freedom. Upper-middle class pre-service teachers tend to have a more favorable or positive social distance attitude toward minority and national groups than lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) to a degree that could be due to chance less than one time in a hundred.

Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between upper-middle class pre-service teachers and lower-middle class pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background)? As seen in Table 2, a mean difference of -11.14 favoring the upper-middle class pre-service teachers yielded a critical ratio or t of -3.25 at the .002 level of significance. This level of significance indicates a highly significant difference between groups for 108 degrees of freedom. Upper-middle class pre-service teachers tend to have a more favorable or positive social distance attitude toward minority or national groups than lower-middle class pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background) to a degree that could be due to chance less than two times in a thousand.

Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between upper-middle class pre-service teachers and lower class pre-service teachers? As seen in Table 2, a mean difference of -7.20 favoring the upper-middle class pre-service teachers yielded a critical ratio or t of -2.41 at the .02 level of significance. This level of significance indicates a significant difference between groups for 89 degrees of freedom. Upper-middle class pre-service teachers tend to have a more favorable or positive social distance attitude toward minority or national groups than lower class pre-service teachers to a degree that could be due to chance less than two times in a hundred.

Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) and lower-middle class pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background)? As seen in Table 2, a mean difference of -4.31 favoring the lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) yielded a critical ratio or t or -1.24 at the .22 level of significance. This level of significance indicates a substantial but not significant difference between groups for 137 degrees of freedom. Although a substantial difference was revealed between groups, the difference is not strong enough to suggest with much confidence that lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) have a more favorable or positive social distance attitude toward minority and national groups than lower-middle pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background).

Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) and lower class pre-service teachers? As seen in Table 2, a mean difference of -.36 favoring the lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) yielded a critical ratio or t of -.12 at the .91 level of

significance. This level of significance indicates a negligible difference between groups for 127 degrees of freedom. It can be stated with confidence that there is no difference between lower-middle class pre-service teachers (part-college home background) and lower class pre-service in social distance attitudes toward minority and national groups.

Is there a significant difference in social distance attitudes between lower-middle class pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background) and lower class pre-service teachers? As seen in Table 2, a mean difference of 3.95 favoring the lower class pre-service teacher yielded a critical ratio or t of 1.06 at the .29 level of significance. This level of significance indicates a real but not significant difference between groups for 97 degrees of freedom. Although a real difference was revealed between groups, the difference is not strong enough to suggest with much confidence that lower class pre-service teachers have a more favorable or positive social distance attitude toward minority and national groups than lower-middle class pre-service teachers (high-school diploma home background).

On the basis of the significant findings of this study, a directional hypothesis can be formulated and recommended for further empirical testing at Mankato State University and other teacher education institutions: Upper-middle social class pre-service teachers tend to have a significantly more favorable or positive social distance attitude toward minority and national groups than either lower-middle or lower social class pre-service teachers.

The social distance attitudes of Mankato State University pre-service teachers toward minority and national groups appears to be related functionally to the social status positions of their families as defined by educational attainment.

NOTES

1. M. E. Shaw and J. M. Wright, Scales for the Measurement of Attitudes (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1967), p. 407.

2. E. T. Hiller, Principles of Sociology (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933), pp. 36-37.

3. Ibid., p. 41.

4. R. A. Ellis, "Social Status and Social Distance," Sociology and Social Research, 40 (March-April, 1956), pp. 240-246.

5. E. S. Bogardus, Social Distance (Los Angeles: E. S. Bogardus, 1959), p. 12.

6. J. Hodowanic (ed.), "MSU Student Profile," Mankato State Today, 7 (Fall, 1975), p. 7.

7. Warner often combines the lower-middle class and upper-lower (working class) into the stratum of "the common man." Approximately 83 percent of the subjects in this study can be classified as members of Warner's "common man" stratum.

8. E. S. Bogardus, "A Social Distance Scale," Sociology and Social Research, 17 (1933), pp. 265-271.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. J. A. Kahl, The American Class Structure (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 187-217.